

Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up

DCS Communications Office

January 21, 2005

The Week Ahead

Tue., Jan. 25 –The Commissioner, along with DCS staff, attends meetings with the TAC and Children's Rights, Inc.

Thu., Jan. 27 – The Commissioner attends an SIU retreat.

DCS Speak-Outs

Can you think of strategies to help ensure a more productive and content workforce within the agency?

Are there moves that could boost employee morale that have not been considered or implemented?

Do you have concerns about the department as an employee?

As outlined in the Path to Excellence, the Department of Children's Services will be hosting a series of speak-outs, designed to provide a platform to engage DCS employees in honest dialogue about issues of concern. The DCS Speak-Outs are scheduled to occur the last week of February, and are planned to be held at consortium sites throughout the state. A total of 600 employees will be invited to attend and participate in the Speak-Outs.

However, organizers are interested in feedback from all DCS employees. If you have a concern, issue or question that you feel should be considered at the Speak-Outs, please e-mail your thoughts or inquiries to DCS.SpeakOuts@state.tn.us.

Commissioner's One-Year Anniversary

This week, Central Office staff threw the Commissioner a surprise party, commemorating her one-year anniversary with DCS. Communications director Andrea Turner exercised persistence in keeping the Commissioner in her office, while other staff members worked hurriedly to set up for the party.

When Viola P. Miller emerged, she was greeted by DCS staff, who shared their favorite memories since her arrival to the department. Lifework Productions, a division of Family and Children's Service, also brought a quartet to sing for the Commissioner – a song about the diversity and meaning of family.



Upper Cumberland Vacancies

There are several vacancies in the Upper Cumberland region. They include the following:

- CPS CM 4 position in the Smith County office, which works on the CPS team for Smith, Macon and DeKalb counties
- Two HCCM CM 4 positions, currently housed in the Jackson County office, and covers HCCM for Smith, Macon and DeKalb counties

For more information on these positions or to apply, contact Linda Maggart, team coordinator for Smith, Macon and DeKalb counties, at (931) 405-1047.

Final Figures for Building Families – One Child at a Time

Submitted by Patricia C. Parker and Commissioner Viola P. Miller

In October, each region was asked to set a goal as to how many adoptions could be finalized before the end of the year. Commissioner Miller then charged each region to meet its goal, giving birth to the year-end adoptions initiative.

The final number is in. For Building Families – One Child at a Time, 452 adoptions were finalized by December 31, 2004, thereby exceeding the original goal of 400 adoptions. The regions accomplished the following percentages of their respective goals:

South Central – 150 percent
Knox – 143 percent
Southeast – 133 percent
East – 128 percent
Hamilton – 125 percent
Davidson – 116 percent
Mid-Cumberland – 113 percent
Southwest – 108 percent
Northwest – 96 percent
Shelby – 94.4 percent
Upper Cumberland – 87.5 percent
Northwest – 65 percent

As the winner, the South Central region will have their choice of a piece of new equipment to enhance their work. Also congratulatory is that four other regions – East, Hamilton, Knox and Southeast exceeded their goal by 25 percent or more.

The collective statewide team, led by a lead liaison in each region, was key to the success of Building Families. Appointed by each regional administrator, the adoption liaisons included Kevin Walker (Davidson), Deborah Huseman (Mid-Cumberland), Sukanda Langley (East), Laura Beth Adams (Northeast), Eugene Gary (Knox), Susan Maddux (Southeast), Karen Nichols (Hamilton), Julia Cook (Upper Cumberland), Tami Long (South Central), Yalunda McClatchen (Southwest), Dimple Dudley (Northwest) and Gwynn Kersey (Shelby).

Many of these adoptions would have been finalized during this time anyway, because that's what DCS does! Others were finalized because of that extra push that everyone made. It was truly remarkable how everyone stepped up to the plate amid all their other job responsibilities, not to mention seeing that all our children had gifts for Christmas.

Regions had made their list of targeted finalizations and did not just “check them twice,” but over and over. If an insurmountable barrier came up with a case, regions looked to other children that were not even on their original goal list and worked diligently to get those children placed and finalized. Aside from the number of children whose adoptions were finalized by December 31, a tremendous amount of work was done on cases that will be finalized in January and February.

This initiative could not have been successful without the leadership of the aforementioned point persons, as well as the joint efforts of staff in the counties, DCS attorneys, contact agency staff, private attorneys, judges, Central Office staff and, most importantly, the children and adoptive families themselves.

Let us all celebrate a job well done!

CPS Call to Excellence

Submitted by Denise Alexander, Director, Intake and Investigations

Tennessee CPS Mission: Tennessee Child Protective Services – Protecting Children, Preserving Families, Building Communities.

Tennessee CPS Vision: “Our vision is to be innovative in the prevention and protection of children, while preserving families and communities with the utmost professionalism and integrity.”

We are actively working to improve Tennessee Child Protective Services, making it a strong program that provides safety and protection to the children in our communities.

In order to enhance communication among CPS program staff, representatives have been identified from each region to assist in getting the word out to the field regarding critical CPS issues, such as policy changes and CPS initiatives. Their role is to be a link between CPS Central Office program staff and regional CPS staff. They will assist in utilizing best practices in our program.

The regional representatives have participated in strategic planning helping to clarify the vision, mission and goals of CPS. The group will be responsible for reviewing and providing feedback for new initiatives and implementations.

Members include Lori Hammond (Hamilton), Sam Rutherford (Northeast), Terri Wiggins (Knox), Joan Davis (East), Robert Ring (Upper Cumberland), Carla Webb (Davidson), Tonya Christenson (Mid-Cumberland), Jan Hill (South Central), Cindy Kilpatrick (Southeast), Phyllis Webb (Northwest), Gayle James (Southwest), Wanda Mott (Shelby), Mary Ann Waddell (Shelby), Bridget Bandy (Central Office), Eureva Elmore (Central Office), Diane Mangrum (Central Intake), Kimberly Moore (Central Intake), Sarah Samberg (Central Intake) and Carla Aaron (SIU).

The group talks weekly via polycom and meets face-to-face monthly. You can expect to hear about changes as they begin from the identified representatives.

Continuous Quality Improvement

Submitted by Bethany Womack, Children's Services Program Coordinator, CQI

The CQI process has now been implemented in all of the regions. All of the regional CQI coordinators have worked very hard this past quarter, establishing teams and introducing the CQI process to regional staff. CQI teams in the Southeast region, guided by regional coordinator Elaine Hong, began meeting during October 2004 and have already begun to see positive results from putting their ideas into action.

Teams in the Southeast region were given the task of focusing their first CQI efforts on improving community attitude toward DCS and increasing the morale of DCS staff. One of these teams used their community contacts to form a partnership with a local church. Church members have volunteered to mentor at-risk families in areas of positive discipline, homemaking, medical care and meal preparation. The team was able to facilitate the publication of a series of articles in the local newspaper highlighting the services DCS provides to families and children, recruitment of foster parents and publicizing their community partnership. In addition, the team is off to a great start for the first quarter of 2005. They have planned meetings with schools in every county in their cluster to increase and improve the quality of communication with the schools in their region.

Another team set up an open house for the community at a county DCS office. They placed a public service announcement in the local newspaper to invite the community and developed targeted invitations for Community Service Agency staff and community members in the education, legal, law enforcement, medical and mental health fields. An invitation to the community describes this open house as "the opportunity for our department to exchange ideas with all of you regarding the youth in care as well as for youth in non-custodial care in the community."

Other CQI teams in Southeast have developed plans to educate community agencies on appropriate CPS reporting and have created a process through which weekly changes can more easily and consistently shared with staff, and tracked legal information to develop strategies to improve court attendance by caseworkers and team leaders. Congratulations on all your hard work!

Core Leadership

**Core Leadership Meeting
Bonnie Hommrich, Presiding
January 18, 2005**

Commissioner Comments

The Commissioner discussed the leadership team now in place in Wilson County.

Next Tuesday, the plaintiffs' attorneys and the TAC will be here. CLT anticipates they will want to hear about SIU, psychotropic medications, implementation plans, the needs assessment and continuous quality improvement.

Regions were challenged to work aggressively toward a goal of reducing custody numbers by 800 children by the end of March. The initiative is FACTS (Families And Children Together and Safe). The emphasis is on identifying children who can be reunified safely and providing identified families needed services.

Personnel: B.J. Bishop and William Haynes

Central Office needs to improve its data capturing for payroll processes. Personnel is recommending that each division establish a data capture timekeeper and an approved back-up. Divisions should submit a list of individuals charged with this responsibility to B.J. Bishop by the end of January.

The Department of Personnel has asked that any executive service appointments or salary exception requests be provided to them at least two weeks in advance. Any questions regarding this should be directed to B.J. Bishop.

As DCS transitions the CSAs, there will be a considerable workload delegated to our personnel staff. If you have any vacancies, Personnel suggests filling them before this transition begins.

The department is beginning a reduction in our residential facilities. Affected facilities are Northeast Tennessee Academy, Lift Academy, Nashville Transition Center, Memphis Group Home and the Observation and Assessment Center. Personnel is working with these facilities with this transition.

Core Leadership Members' New Year's Resolutions

William Haynes

- Learn more about child welfare and social work in order to better do the work of DCS
- Spend more time on staff development
- Have customer-friendly units that share information and offer training
- Be a better regional liaison
- Improve the PE process so that it adds value to the organization and provide training across the state

- Establish an employee recognition system
- Organize statewide Speak-Outs
- Integrate cultural competency into pre-service and in-service training

Tom Riche

- Increase knowledge of child welfare
- Visit every region
- Spend more time with Ken Sanders and Joe Cimino learning the budget and fiscal process
- Stick by goals better
- Provide better support to the training consortium

Paul Montebello

- Complete the transition of reporting process from PR to IS
- Complete development of a tracking system for complaints for the Ombudsman
- Restructure contract monitoring for information and evaluation (report card)
- Spend more time with his region, South Central

Other Updates

Brenda Bell will provide CLT with a two-page overview of COA next week to begin our thinking about accreditation.

Petrina Jones-Jesz has volunteered to be the point person in strategic planning. R&D will lead the effort. She has a goal to have a statewide team in place and to educate everyone about the process of developing a strategic plan. There will be a kickoff in a couple of months with CLT and the RAs, and the planning will begin. The process needs to be inclusive and engaging. It will take a year to get our plan completed.

The 01-05 TNKids release has been deployed. Michael Price's team is in the field this week to assist with the transition and provide support. They will have daily status calls to track the progress of the release. If there are problems with TNKids, please always notify the Help Desk, so the issues may be tracked. There may need to be times this week when the system is re-booted as fixes are put into place.

